

His Mercy and His Men - VI

What is Confession? - revisited

Confession has two parts, we learn from our Catechism. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution from the Pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

We learn this, also, from what we heard tonight, of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ; for in what we heard, we hear a call to acknowledge our own sins and shortcomings. *You daughters of Jerusalem, our Lord Jesus said to the women weeping and lamenting at the sight of His sufferings, weep not for me, rather, weep for yourselves and for your children. For if this is what is done to the tree that is fresh, what will happen to that which is withered?*

To have the sufferings of our Lord Jesus set before us, as we have tonight, and as we always have in Christian preaching and teaching, what it should make us to do is not to feel sorry for Him, and certainly not to feel good about ourselves, that we are so good as to feel sorry for Him; rather, it should lead us to *repentance*, to consideration of our own sins and shortcomings, and concern for our own eternal fate. For judgement is coming.

His blood be upon us and our children!, the Jews had said, when Pilate washed his hands and declared himself innocent of the blood of our Lord Jesus; and indeed it shall, but not upon them only: *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, as He has had His holy Apostle John write it, and every eye shall see Him, even they who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth shall wail on account of Him. Even so, Amen.*

All the tribes of the earth shall wail on account of Him. For *He* shall come in glory to judge both the living and the dead, who suffered so severely on account of us; and it was on account of us that He suffered all He suffered, on account of our sin, our ungodliness and unbelief and impurity and evil.

And His judgement is dreadful, that we judged Him who is the only rightful Judge of good and evil, and set our own judgement above His, and would not instead submit to His judgement and honour and obey His will in all things.

For behold, the days are coming, as we heard it that He said it, when they will say: Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never gave birth and the breasts that never nursed! Then they will begin to say to the mountains: Fall upon us! and to the hills: Cover us!

It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, to fall under His judgement and damnation. Our Lord Jesus knows this better than anyone; He is Himself God, and knows everything. And when He said: *if this is what is done to the tree that is fresh, what will happen to that which is withered?*, He was beginning to actually bear it Himself, and sense the severity of the wrath of God.

Weep not for me, rather, weep for yourselves and for your children. These words of His are a call to have concern for our own eternal fate, and consider carefully our sin, evil and ungodliness and unbelief and impurity in our lives, and in our hearts and minds, and to turn away from our evil and ungodliness and turn to Him instead. It is a call to *confess* our sin, that is: to submit to His judgement over it, and seek mercy with Him. If we will not, we will not find mercy. As He has had His holy Apostle John write it: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us.* And as the Book of Proverbs says it: *He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.*

So by all means, do take His words to heart: *Weep not for me, rather, weep for yourselves.* For *if this is what is done to the tree that is fresh, what will happen to that which is withered?* What will happen to those in whom the faith has withered away, and the love of God, and drowned and died in ungodliness and unbelief? Well, what will happen we see in how God dealt with Him who had taken upon Himself the evil and ungodliness of all sinners.

And let us, by all means, turn away from sin, from all evil and impurity and ungodliness in our hearts and minds, and seek the aid of His Holy Spirit to amend our ways.

Pilate was a man of little pity; still, he was not pleased with having had our Lord Jesus given over to suffering and death; he was aware of his wrongdoing, and annoyed and irritated by it. But *repentant* he was not. He sought to compensate by honouring our Lord Jesus in His death, as if to throw Him a bone, and to annoy and irritate the Jews and imply that the blame was theirs for what he himself had done: he wrote an inscription and put it on the cross, which read: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.* And when the Jews complained about it, his response was again one of annoyed arrogance: *What I wrote, I wrote!*; much like it has become common to say today about what you have said or done: *It is what it is!* He was not going to be bothered with whether he had done right or wrong. He had learnt nothing. Certainly, he was not repentant!

No one born of God continues in sin, writes the holy Apostle John, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. In other words, those in whom the Word of God has done its work, so that they have come to embrace the faith, they cannot be comfortable to carry on and continue in sin; the love of God, which has been sowed in them with His Word of love, will not allow it. If you as a Christian are comfortable to continue unrepentantly in ungodly arrogance, it shows that you have let the love of God die in you, and the faith - or at least that you are in the process of letting the love of God die in you, and the faith. And if this is what is done to the tree that is fresh, what will happen to that which is withered?

So take His words to heart, by all means, and seek mercy with Him. Turn away from your sinful ways and confess your sin, that is: submit to His judgement against it, and seek His aid in amending your ways, that you may not be lost to His love and fall under judgement and damnation.

Confession has two parts, though, as our Catechism teaches it. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution from the Pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in Heaven. True repentance, and true Christian faith, is so much more than grieving for your sin and seeking to amend your ways; it is even so much more than seeking aid from God to amend your ways and make your wrong right.

We learn this, also, from what we heard tonight, of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, about the fate of Judas the betrayer. He saw the wrong of what he had done, and he grieved for it. He even made a desperate attempt to make right what he had done wrong by giving back the rewards for his wrongdoing; but it was all in vain.

Truly no man can ransom another, says the Psalm or give to God the price of his life. In fact, no sinner can even ransom himself or herself, and make his or her wrongdoing right. For, as the Psalm goes on to say, the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on for ever and never see the pit. And our Lord Jesus, who knows all things, and knew all that would happen, had already said of Judas: None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction!

Judas was lost to the love of God; not so much because of his betrayal, though, but rather because of the even more outrageous evil, that He did not believe in our Lord Jesus and did not seek salvation and forgiveness for his wrongdoings in Him. He did not seek or see his salvation in Christ.

Instead he despaired, and went and hanged himself and died in unbelief.

Confession has two parts, our Catechism teaches. For so much more is involved in the salvation of sinners than agonising over your sin, or admitting to it, and seeking to amend your ways, even more than seeking the aid of God in doing so. Far greater is the love of God, what He has done for us sinners: that the Son of God, who shall come in glory to judge both the living and the dead, has suffered Himself His own judgement against the sin of all sinners.

He had Himself born into our kind to be baptised with sinners, and baptised into the sin of all sinners, to bear it for us, and take it away from us, as the Lamb of God, the only sacrifice sufficient to make our wrongdoings right and pay the price and penalty for evil and ungodliness and impurity in our lives, and in our hearts and minds. And with His sufferings and death the price and penalty has been paid, in full and in abundance, for all sins and shortcomings of ours. We are free from all sin and guilt and debt before God, right with Him and righteous before His judgement. And so, we shall not perish and die forever in His wrath, but rather live and be with Him for ever in His Kingdom, in the fullness of His goodness and His glory.

This is the promise He has sent His servants to proclaim to all sinners, with His own authority as Judge of the living and the dead, who has Himself borne all judgement for us. And with His promise, what He promises is given, really given, to all who hear His promise in faith; to all who submit to His judgement against sin, and submit, also, to His other judgement, that which is far greater: that on account of what He has done, we are right with Him and righteous before His judgement.

With His Word of what His love has done for us He claims us as His own; He who shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead declares us to be free from all sin and guilt before His judgement, as His blood is upon us, not for judgement, but rather as that which cleanses us from all sin. He clothes us in His own righteousness, His goodness and innocence before God, whole and complete as it is, not partial or piecemeal, as His tunic was not divided. As He has had His holy Apostle John write it: *To all who received Him He gave the right to become children of God, to all who believed in His name. And we are that, when we submit to His judgement and surrender to His love and take His promise to heart.*

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Amen.